

Light Affliction and Eternity

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If you will this morning, turn with me to our text which is found in 2 Corinthians 4, the last two verses of 2 Corinthians 4:17-18.

17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; 18 While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Let us pray.

Dear heavenly Father, how great and holy and just and righteous thou art. I thank you, Lord, for bringing us here this morning. Thank you, Lord, for thy mercies that are new each day. I ask, O Lord, that you would, indeed, make eternity a reality to us this morning. Reveal to us the realities that you have made, accomplished and secured, ordained for thy people. O Lord, give us, indeed, a deep comparison of things that are temporal to what you reveal to us as eternal. I pray, O Lord, that thy Spirit would enliven, would wake up, would bring to us the truth of thy Son as only thou can and, Lord, that you would come with power to reveal that, Lord, which you have ordained for us this day for the feeding of our souls for thy glory and thy name's sake. For this I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

This week, the Lord has impressed upon me a lot of thoughts about eternity and really when the Lord led me to these verses and I read them and thought on them, I knew then that he was telling me that this would be our text today. I look around and I see those who live in my house, of course, and those that I spend a great deal of time with every day, and I think that the biggest things we struggle with every day is sin and carnality, sin and the world, sin and the things of this world, and the Lord revealed to me this week as he has many times, that the only antidote or the only thing that can keep the mind or reveal to the mind, would be a revelation to the mind, is the eternality of Christ and to take our mind from where we are here to translate into the heavens, the heaven of heavens, and to take us to the throne. I think everyone in this room, young or old depending upon your walk with the Lord and what he has revealed to you, know this. You know that in this life it's hard and there are many afflictions, afflictions of the mind, afflictions of the body, afflictions of the soul, and we know that the only remedy for these afflictions is to be

taken to the throne of our great Lord, the mercy seat, to find mercy, to find peace, to find comfort, to find truth in why things are the way they are.

When I look at our text today which is two verses so I don't want to go too long before we get into it, the very first part of it really strikes me this morning, that the Apostle Paul, this great preacher of the Gospel, this man of God who the Lord gave great truth to, who just in the verse prior told us that his outward man is perishing day by day, that means it's dying. Earlier in this chapter up in verses 8, 9 and 10 he says, "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body." So right then he gives us a little insight into why the Lord's ordained these afflictions so that we can partake in the sufferings of Christ because he went first.

But I'm struck by these words, "our light affliction." There are some of you in here that I know for many years and I've seen afflictions that have been far greater than any afflictions of the body the Lord has given me, and at the time that you were going through them, I'm sure you wouldn't stand up and say, "This is a light affliction." Sometimes the Lord takes away our walking, he takes away our very being and we're down in a bed lying on our back and we can't even get up, we can't walk, we can do nothing, and at that time it would be very difficult to stand up and say, "These are light afflictions." So what does the apostle mean when he says that these are light afflictions that we have in this life? Well, I believe that it is light in relation to three things, to three things this morning. I'll briefly tell you each one. In relation to what we deserve, these afflictions are light.

The word of God tells us in Psalm 103:10 that, "He has not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." That says a mouthful right there about what we deserve and the graciousness of our Lord. He has not dealt with us the wages of sin is death. He has not dealt with us the curse for not keeping the law. He has not dealt with his children that way. When the Apostle Paul writes that it's a light affliction, when we sit there, sometimes we chuckle and we say, "Well, how is it light?" But there are ways that it is light and that is the first one, in relation to what we deserve.

When I think of the wrath that was poured out upon the Son of God who stood in my place to be a propitiation for my sins and the sins of the entire church, I think about how hot and how violent that wrath must have been to punish sin in that way; how just and holy that wrath must have been to pour out upon his own beloved Son. And that's what I'm saying this morning, that our afflictions in this life although they may be grievous, in relation to what we deserve, they're very light.

Jeremiah writes, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it?" Our hearts in their natural state are so corrupt and so vile and so deserving of wrath and so deserving of God to put an end to that which is an affront to him. Isaiah said it this way in Isaiah 1:5-6, he said, "Why should ye be stricken any more?" speaking to Israel, "ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint.

From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment." That's our natural state. That is the state of every man and every man as we're fallen in Adam is deserving of the wrath of God upon that sin.

So when we think of a light affliction, we have to think of it first and foremost in how and what we deserve in comparison to that and that leads us to the second one to consider this morning: our light affliction is very light considering what will be poured out upon those that are outside of Christ. Jesus said three times where the worm dieth not and the fires are not quenched. Those are very sobering words, that there will not be a termination of life in eternity in hell. There will not be a termination of life. There will be an eternal punishment, an eternal wrath being poured out upon sin where the fires are never quenched, the fires of God's holiness and justice will never be extinguished. Those afflictions will never never be unabated. They will continue and they are eternal and in light of the light affliction that we carry in this life, I hope this morning that the Lord takes us to see that they are light compared to what we deserve, compared to what natural man will have all in eternity if he's outside of Christ, and for hopefully you and I, for those who are in Christ Jesus, they are a light affliction compared to what our Savior suffered first. Their light in comparison to what Jesus suffered from birth to death as he was persecuted, as he was ridiculed, as he was mocked. And we won't even get into the physicality of the thorns, the spears, the whippings, the scourgings, but to be persecuted, to be laughed at, to be mocked to scorn, "You're just a carpenter's son. If you were the Son of God, you would come down and save yourself." This Almighty King who had all power that he could have sent legions of angels to destroy every one of them there that were outside of him.

I think about and the Lord does tell me, "Yeah, they are light afflictions," because sometimes when I am sitting there and I'm thinking about how wicked I am and how sin continues over and over, and how easy I follow after the things of the world, and how palatable they are to me and how easy it is for me to keep doing those things, it causes great grief as the Holy Spirit brings conviction. It causes great grief and great sorrow and I think of that affliction of my mind and when it goes to what I do deserve and that's when I read this holy book that says if I've not fulfilled one law, I'm worthy of not only death but to be under that curse in eternity forever. And I hope the Holy Spirit impresses that upon you this morning, the deservedness we have in ourselves, but what the glory of what we have in Christ is, that, yes, he has saved us from that, but these afflictions that Paul writes about being light and the next time, and listen, all of us to an extent of some kind will go through some affliction this week, some of them more grievous than others, and yet the word of God tells us, the Holy Spirit informs us this morning that they are light and may the Lord impress that upon you the next time or while today while you're going through that affliction if it's physical, that the Lord in his suffering, in his laying down of his life suffered far greater in his body. If it's spiritual, if you feel today alienated from Christ, think about Christ's separation from the Father and what that was like to be made sin who knew no sin.

Now we can't get there. We can't get to any of this without faith. We can't get to any of this without the Holy Spirit revealing to us that it's truth, and that's my prayer this morning, that the Holy Spirit comes in this hour with power and takes away all of the filth of this world and the things that we're thinking of no matter how important they are to you in this hour, that he makes the eternal realities far more important than anything. That's what this whole text says today, that there are the temporal and there are the eternal and they don't compare. It doesn't compare. You could be the President of the United States, you could be the richest man in the world, you can have every blessing known to man and all of the carnal riches of this world, you could have the highest title, you could have men fawning over you wherever you go, they could be opening the doors for you and saying, "Oh, this is who you are. You mean so much to me." And if you're not in Christ, you will be where the worm dieth not and the fires are never quenched and that is a reality of eternity and I pray this morning that the Lord impresses that upon us in relation to him of how they are light. Peter wrote this, he said, "For Christ also has once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God being put to death in the flesh but quickened by the Spirit."

I was touched this week as I was reading some of Job again and I was thinking after all that Job went through and that was an eternal reality to Job at the end of one when the Lord took everything from him and Job said in 1:21 and 22, he said, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb and naked shall I return thither." Temporal. That's what he said. These things are temporal. "The Lord gives and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." That's eternal. Blessed be the Lord God who reigns on high who is sovereign over all of these things on earth. Blessed be his name. "In all this, Job sinned not nor charged God foolishly."

I read on a little bit to think about, and shamefully, I've got to say where his wife came to him and said, "Job, you know, do you still retain your integrity?" Well, that integrity that Job kept was Christ in him and that's the whole difference between natural man and the spiritual man, the one that's in Christ. Christ never leaves him nor forsakes him. Christ is that answer to the world that comes up to you and says, "Why are you this way? Why are you not out there fighting and trying to get some kind of better place for yourself?" There's a contentment that's in Christ that the world knows nothing of and that's a contentment also in afflictions.

Job said to her, he said, she said, "Curse God and die! He has brought all this into your life. Clearly he has done this to destroy you." And I know there are times in our life we've been led to that same conclusion that God is not for me, he is against me. These things that in his providence has brought to me, we know the doctrine tells us that they're for good but the experiential man can't get there until the Holy Spirit reveals to him that they are good. That's what the Holy Spirit does. That's what faith takes us to, what Christ has done on our behalf. That's where he took Job when she said, "Curse God and die," and he said, "But he said unto her, thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God and shall we not receive evil. In all this did not Job sin with his lips."

Oh, to be kept that way not to murmur and complain against God's providence against these light afflictions which we're immediately told in our text are only for a moment. James reminds us that, "What is your life? Even as a vapor." I thought about that very strongly this week. I was sitting at my desk at home and I was reading and I put my hand over my heart as I'm doing right now and I felt it beating, beating very strongly, and the Lord impressed upon me one day it won't beat anymore. The moment this heart stops beating, the moment my breath leaves me, I'm in eternity. I will be known as I am known.

That's a hard thing. I'm 48 years old and that's relatively young, and when I was yet the age of my children, my son is going to be 20 this week, Lord willing, when I was his age, I didn't think much about eternity. I was like him, I was strong and I felt like I had my life ahead of me, I was bogged down in college like he is, and those were the things that really struck me about life, they really weighed me down, but as the Lord has matured me in him, the thoughts of this world seem to dissipate more and more and the thoughts of eternity are brought to me, it's so much more important to know. "Lord, assure me, make your calling and my election sure."

Where will I spend eternity? I know that there are churches probably this hour having some altar call telling men to come down and choose Christ, you have control of your destination in eternity, but we know in this room that's not the case. It rests in a sovereign Lord and if we were elected before the foundation of the world, the Lord will reveal to us in this life that we are safe and secure in the eternal Christ.

Oh, to be brought there. Oh, to be taken from these light afflictions. Yes, they are for a moment, they are for a moment but in our life as much as we get our roots put down into this life and we live it every day and we seem to cleave to the ground more and more, we seem to cleave to those around us more and more, we cleave to this life that we have, we don't want to leave it. Normality. That's not seeing the eternal reality of what life is, what life really is, eternal life. Not temporal life, eternal life.

Our light affliction which is but for a moment. It is but for a moment. Many afflictions we'll have but we're told, the Psalmist tells us in 34:19, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous but the Lord delivereth him out of them all." Out of them all. There is nothing that he has designed for you and I that is more than we can bear in him, that he has not opened the door in the way of escaping and that way of escape will always be the same way. It is the eternal Lord, the way, the truth and the life. That's how we escape. It's the only way.

We're in dire need every hour of our life to have these eternal realities. Yes, it's a light affliction. Yes, it is for a moment and it worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Paul introduces eternity here. He says in comparison to eternity, how can we think so much of the temporal, but that's what we all are. It's really a sad state, it's really a helpless state. You know, dependency is all throughout these words in the Scriptures. Dependency. I read the word sometime when I'm at my desk and it's just me and the Lord and I say, "Lord, how can I?" You know, "If you love me, keep my commandments," and I say, "Lord, I do love you," and then I go out and I break his

commandments and then I'm back at my desk saying, "Lord, I must not love you," because that's what logic tells me here. I've learned lots of logic in math and I'm a math guy so it proves out that way. The Lord says, "Love me, keep my commandments." I say I love him, I don't keep the commandments, therefore I don't love him, but is that true?

I think of how deep the eternal reality is that if I have a union with Christ in eternity, that he dwells with me, he dwells in me keeping those commandments. It's Christ in me, the hope of glory. It's not my carnal man. My carnal man never will. My natural man never will and to have that reality impressed upon me every day and believe me, it's not every day, but when the Lord does come with that reality. As I said, when I sat at my desk this week and I had my hand on my heart that way, it just came so powerful of how much life really is a vapor and we all can sit in here and you older ones in here as you have lived a long life, can look back and say, "I know that day is coming." But for those of us that are midlife or younger life, we sit there and we go, "Oh, well we know it's coming but in the natural way of things, it's a while off." But we're not guaranteed that. Nowhere in this book will you see that it's guaranteed that man lives X amount of years. Not with a sovereign Lord.

Eternity is a heartbeat away. Eternity is a breath away. It really is and we can't get there. We're so caught up and enamored with the world that we may think it and assent to it in our mind and go, "Yeah, it is," but as quickly as we leave this place and get back in our life, we'll forget it. We'll go on with those temporal realities.

Well, Paul tells us that they work for us. These things, Romans 8:28, we know what that says, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose," and that's what Paul says here again. He says these all work, these light afflictions, the providences of God, they work for us and what are they used for? They pull down pride. They pull down self. They lay self in a position at the feet of Christ. That's how needful they are.

Paul tells us later in chapter 10, verse 4, he says, "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal." I know, follow me, this spiritual gift of affliction to the soul of the child of God, to us is a mighty weapon of God to bring down those things. We rise up, knowledge puffeth up. Well, what does the Lord show us? That we know nothing compared to his vast eternal knowledge. What is it that we really know? I could preach up here all day about eternity and I know nothing, nothing about it. I could preach about Christ all day long and I know nothing compared to the unsearchable riches that are in his love, that are in his mercy and in his person.

"For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds." Those strongholds in our life are those prideful things, the rituals, the traditions, those things that, "Well, we've done this this way our whole life. My parents did it this way. My parents' parents this way. We've always looked at it this way." Those are carnal things and we need a weapon of Christ to bring us to him.

Listen, in that room of affliction, oh, the Lord teaches his children. I can't speak as much to some of you in here to the physical afflictions, but I certainly can to the spiritual ones. To be exercised in the soul to where you're at the end of yourself, to be destitute and desperate, but the Lord is faithful. Why? Why? It pulls down those strongholds in my life, that male pride, and I call it male pride. I mean, we all have pride. It seems like us males get a little bit more because we're the head of the home and we feel like we're protectors and all those things. We're going to be tough and all that stuff. The Lord brings all that down. He does it through afflictions, mind, body, soul.

He does it for our good, to conform us to his image, to bring us to rest upon him. Isn't that what Paul said when he talked about that thorn in the flesh? He said he gloried in it. Why? So that the power of Christ may rest upon him. That's what the Lord does in these light afflictions. They have a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, the glory of Christ rests upon us when he brings us and destroys self. That's a continuous destroying and mortification. Every day we seem to get a new fill-up of self.

"A far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." The prize for these afflictions and being brought through them is to see him as he is, to see and to walk in the footsteps of our Lord who went first; to know that we're told in this life we must suffer and that the way the Lord said, "Take up your cross daily and follow me." We all have crosses in here to bear, some emotional, some physical, some mentally, some anguish, and we bear them every day but we'll never bear them outside of Christ. We'll never bear them in our own strength.

Then we move to verse 18, "While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen." How? How is it? We all have to see with our eyes just like Thomas, "Lord, unless I put my hand in your side and I feel the nail prints in your hands." How is it that we can be delivered? The same way he was delivered. Be not faithless but believing. When the Lord speaks that to us, we believe. When the Lord comes with the faith of the Son of God, his faith, we believe.

Hebrews 11:1 tells us that faith is the substance of things hoped for. It is the evidence, the evidence, the proof. Faith proved out is the things that are not seen. The evidence of things not seen. Not seen. I've heard earlier in my life ministers come and they visit the church and I was there and they would define faith that way, that faith is you have to see it before you could believe it. So they'd stand up there, you know, they'd all be there after money and everything and they'd tell you that whatever you want in your life, if you could see it, now close your eyes, see it, see that it's accomplished, that's faith. Is that an affront to what the word of God says?

Faith is the substance of things hoped for. Our hope is in Christ, the hope of glory, the evidence of things not seen. We can't see it with our eyes, our carnal eyes. Paul told us that in 1 Corinthians 2:9, "Eyes have not seen nor ears heard neither has entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for them that love him." We can't attain to that knowledge but in him we do and we can. We can do all things through him who strengthens us with his faith, with his strength, with his power and his love to believe.

This is a mouthful, the things, while we look at the things which are seen but the things which are not seen, "for the things which are seen are temporal." I'm going to tell you something, on this earth there is not a thing on this earth that is not temporal except your soul. Your soul is the only eternal thing on this earth and everything that we stockpile and, of course, the parables come to mind of those who stockpile their goods of this world and the Lord said to him, "Thou fool. Tonight I require your soul." That's the eternal reality that we have a soul. We lose sight of that because we're so busy taking care of our bodies and taking care of the carnal things in this life. What about your soul, the need for your soul to be fed? The need for your soul to walk with Christ? The need for your soul to be revealed Christ every day? Oh, to see salvation. To see salvation and to rest in the Lord. To see the eternal, not the temporal.

Turn with me now over to Isaiah 51 real quick. Two places to go as we come to the end. Isaiah 51 says this, verse 1, "Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the LORD: look unto the rock." You see, faith leads to a foundation. Faith leads to Christ. There must be a foundation in you, Christ in you, that faith leads to. It's not a will it be? No, it's found in its Maker. It's found in its Author. It's found in its power.

"Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn," that's that vital union, "and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged," and from where we were taken, from where the Lord has saved us from.

"Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him." That's what faith does, it brings us to the eternal reality of what Christ and what God has done for those who went before us; that God and Christ and the Holy Spirit, the Triune God, is the Lord over his church throughout all of the ages.

"For the LORD shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody." This is what's found in Christ. This is an eternal reality. These are the things not seen. They're not the things that we lay up that rust and moth can corrupt here on earth, these are eternal things. It says the faith of the Son of God, the love of the Son of God, the life of Christ.

"Hearken unto me, my people; and give ear unto me, O my nation: for a law shall proceed from me, and I will make my judgment to rest for a light of the people." The law was fulfilled in Christ. He proceeded from the Father to fulfill all things for the child of God, to fulfill all life. These are not temporal, these are eternal.

"My righteousness is near," verse 5, "my salvation is gone forth, and mine arms shall judge the people; the isles shall wait upon me, and on mine arm shall they trust." Then verse 6, "Lift up your eyes to the heavens," that's not heaven, that's the sky, "and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment," temporal things, "and they that dwell therein shall die in like

manner," temporal things, "but," here comes the eternal, "but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished." Isn't that what he said, for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal? Looking unto. While we look not at the things, how do we do that? Through the eyes of faith, the faith of the Son of God. But, oh my goodness, is it not hidden from the world? What a foolish message this would be for the world, to go out and press upon people and tell them just look to the heavens or look to Christ. Christ must do the work. He will do the work.

Jesus said it this way in Matthew 11:25, he said, "At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." Why? "Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight." The sovereignty of God in election, the sovereignty of God in revelation, the sovereignty of God to reveal himself to his people and their light afflictions and the eternal weight of glory that is waiting for them as we get a glimpse of it in this life, but in the life to come, an uninterrupted worship, an uninterrupted life where faith will no longer be needed because we will see him as he is.

Isaiah said in Isaiah 57:15, "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit." That's what the purpose of those afflictions were that we talked about, to bring us to the feet of Christ humbled, with a contrite spirit, "to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." It's all of him.

Oh, to have our text today in view, spiritual view, to have the faith to be given the faith to see how much greater eternity is than anything on this earth. Anything. It's interesting as I mentioned my son earlier, I mentioned all the youth that we have here and we look at, I'm sure as parents you look upon them now and you see how much they struggle with worldly things and how much they struggle with going after worldly things and I know it must grieve you as much as it grieves me. I know that I was there many times in my life, and you know you were there many times in your life so I am thankful that the Lord is faithful, the Lord is faithful to deliver, the Lord is faithful to bring his word. He has called you to live a life in eternity with him. He will do it and I rest in that today when the Lord gives me eyes of faith to see.

I'd like to close this morning in Revelation 7. Eternal reality. If you want to know eternal reality, here it is. I could read this one over and over. Revelation 7, we'll begin in verse 9 to the end of the chapter.

"After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb." Do you see that focus of worship? Do you see the eternal reality where there's nothing to impede worship? There's nothing. You behold the Lord of glory. You behold him. There's no sin there. There's no pain there. There's no afflictions there. There is nothing. There is no carnality there. There is no worldliness there.

"And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, Saying, Amen."